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ABSTRACT

A critique is presented of the new teacher certification and program standards adopted by the State Board of Education of Alabama. The process by which these standards were developed is analyzed, and implications of developing these standards are examined. It is stated that the findings of two major studies of teacher education conducted in Alabama and current national research findings do not serve as a data base for the new teacher education and certification standards in the state. It is further pointed out that some of the specific criteria upon which the standards are based are contradictory to known research in teacher preparation. (JD)

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TEACHER CERTIFICATION IN ALABAMA — AN ALTERNATE VIEW

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The revised requirements for certification of teachers were adopted by the Alabama State Board of Education December 19, 1978. Along with these requirements the State Board also adopted revised standards for approving teacher education programs in Alabama institutions of higher education. While the concept of combining program standards and certification requirements has been viewed as promising in efforts to improve the quality of instruction in Alabama schools, the document adopted for Alabama will fall short of that goal. In order to understand the shortcomings of the document adopted by the State Board of Education it is necessary to review the role of the institutions of higher education in its development.

Since 1939 an organization known as the Alabama Council on Teacher Education made up of deans and chairmen of colleges and departments of education in Alabama served as an advisory committee to the State Department of Education on matters of teacher certification. That organization redefined its focus and emphasis in 1971 when its members reorganized and became the Alabama branch of the American

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Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. The major difference in the new Alabama AACTE and the former Council was the formal adoption of objectives which provided for "continuous search for and promotion of ideas and practices which are most effective in the education of teachers, particularly in the State of Alabama." [1]

Evidence of the Alabama AACTE's interest in improving teacher education was clearly shown in its first meeting (November, 1971) in which the members adopted and recommended to the State Board of Education a comprehensive resolution on teacher education which was subsequently passed by the State Board in January, 1972. That resolution formed the documental basis for most activity aimed at improving teacher education in Alabama for the next seven years. The resolution had fifteen sections specifying how professional certification would be upgraded and included the statement "The State Board . . . shall support the AACTE in carrying out . . . studies of competency-based teacher preparation programs and recommendations for certification criteria accordingly." [2] The remaining thirteen sections of the resolution specified improvements to be made in the area of teacher preparation. These sections encouraged experimentation in teacher preparation; specified that evaluation of programs be directly tied to the teaching competencies of graduates and mastery of information; recognized accreditation by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher

Education as part of criteria for program approval; established a five-year cycle of teacher education program approval; recognized the first-year teaching internship; and proposed that teacher preparation and improvement was to be a responsibility shared by local school systems, the teacher education institutions, and the State Department of Education. Part of that shared responsibility was made official in the final section of the resolution in which the Alabama AACTE was officially identified as a source of continuous input to the State Board of Education with regard to improving teacher education programs.

The Alabama Commission on Higher Education solicited the Alabama AACTE's help in developing a master plan for the coordination and systematic improvement of teacher education in Alabama later in 1972. Subsequent assistance to ACHE took the form of reactions to a white paper on education prepared by the Commission. Alabama AACTE members took official action on the ACHE white paper by supporting many of its recommendations, some with reservations, and rejecting others. The recommendations supported by Alabama AACTE proposed: (1) limiting the expansion of graduate programs in teacher education among State institutions, (2) moving toward competency based teacher education, (3) that all institutions affilliate with NCATE, and (4) identifying AACTE as an advisory board to ACHE on teacher education.

The recommendations receiving qualified support from AACTE called for (1) reducing the duplication of

undergraduate programs in State institutions, (2) curtailing the number of sixth year programs, (3) implementing teacher employment market research, (4) establishing minimum standards based on standardized tests scores for selecting teacher candidates, and (5) opposing the addition of faculty in teacher education programs in State institutions.

The white paper recommendations not supported by AACTE advocated:

1. The use of a standardized test score as a minimum requirement for certification
2. The use of pupil test scores to assess teacher performance
3. The elimination of the sixth year certificate
4. Merit pay for teachers
5. Reducing the retirement age of teachers.

The effects of the 1972 resolution were being experienced by the institutions of higher education by the end of the 1972-73 school year. In spite of the difficulties in implementing the resolutions, Alabama AACTE officially endorsed its principles and petitioned the State Board of Education and ACHE to support increased funding for teacher education programs in State institutions to implement the recommendations. In response to this resolution the State Legislature set aside one million dollars to establish a pilot study of first-year teachers in 1973.

Before the summer of 1973 ended the Alabama AACTE had presented a document to the State Board of Education

endorsing their joint efforts to develop and adopt standards for State approval of teacher training programs in Alabama. What followed was probably the most significant era of improvement of teacher education programs in the State's history. Each standard was stated in such a way that it could be applied to each institution regardless of size, philosophical orientation, or proprietary status. Each standard was addressed by the institution, and a visiting team determined the quality of the means employed to meet the criteria applicable to the standard. Within two years Alabama's standards had been tested and ratified to the extent that they were accepted for interstate reciprocity by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education Certification.

During the two-year period following the 1972 resolution the State Department of Education, in cooperation with the colleges and the local branch of education, had reduced the number of emergency temporary certificates issued from 5,000 to 162. Most of the teachers had returned to institutions with teacher education programs to upgrade their certificates.

The preceding interactions, between the Alabama AACTE and the two agencies of the State involved in teacher education (ACHE and the State Board of Education) illustrate the organization's commitment to quality teacher education. This commitment was further exemplified by action of its executive committee in 1974. It had been long recognized

that the 1966 Certification Bulletin in use at that time was inadequate with its "cookbook" approach to certification. The Alabama AACTE executive committee, of its own volition, appointed a committee to work with State Department personnel to develop a new bulletin for teacher education and certification. The Alabama AACTE membership charged the committee by resolution (January, 1974) to define general education requirements in general terms rather than by specific courses to allow each institution to define general education within the context of its several programs. Although not specifically charged, it was assumed the committee would extend the same principle to other requirements in order that institutions could maintain integrity and flexibility. During the spring of that year the State Superintendent of Education officially designated the Alabama AACTE's committee to coordinate the development of a new bulletin.

It is apparent from this brief sketch of the Alabama AACTE's role in developing standards that the direction and scope of the project to develop comprehensive standards, which include program approval and certification requirements, was fully supported by the institutions of higher education. More specifically, from the time of the initial resolution of the State Board of Education to the adoption of program standards for teacher education institutions, the focus and direction of improving teacher education was the competency of teachers based on evaluation and improvement of teaching skills of pre- and in-service teachers.

The project to write a new certification bulletin proceeded on the competency based target for three of the four years the committee worked on the task.

One year after the Bulletin Revision Committee was appointed, the State Board of Education formed the Committee to Develop Criteria and Procedures for the Evaluation of Teacher Training Institutions and Programs. By Summer of 1976 it became apparent that the Bulletin Committee and the Program Evaluation Committee were working toward the same goals. In a special called meeting July, 1976, after hearing a report of both committees, the Alabama AACTE members unanimously endorsed the efforts and direction of both committees. The first indication that the Bulletin Committee was shifting its emphasis from competency in teaching to a more quantitative structure came in January 1977 when a rough draft of a portion of the new standards was presented to the Alabama AACTE members. This draft established three levels of certification, K-4, 4-8 and 8-12, which was quickly endorsed by the membership. But the elimination of all-grades certification in Art, Music and Physical Education received much opposition. The Bulletin Committee solicited comments and asked that all concerns about the draft should be presented in writing; they would then be considered. The Committee also absolved itself of any responsibility to report further to the Alabama AACTE which had created it. Now its primary professional obligation was to the office of the State Superintendent, which had sanctioned the Committee. That

there would be any discrepancy between the State Board of Education and the Alabama AACTE was not anticipated since both groups had instigated and promoted improvements in teacher education.

It was not until July 31, 1978 that the full impact of the drastic changes made in the direction of the proposed program standards and certification requirements became apparent. On that date the final draft of the new bulletin was mailed to deans of teacher education institutions. The significance of the date is that most teacher education institutions were between terms, and few deans and faculty members were available to review the 258-page proposal. Subsequently, at the October 2-3 meetings of the Alabama AACTE, a majority of the institutional representatives upon finding the final draft of the bulletin replete with language which had changed the initial intent of the project, voted to request the State Superintendent to withdraw its consideration from the October State Board agenda until the major objections and inconsistencies could be resolved. An ad hoc committee of Alabama AACTE members was appointed to meet with the Bulletin Committee to review the written responses of teacher education institutions and to reconcile problems in the draft. The State Superintendent, however, in a reversal of the increasingly cooperative relationship between the State Department of Education and the Alabama AACTE, denied the request. The State Board of Education received

the controversial draft on October 10 and passed a slightly modified version December 19, 1978.

It is paradoxical that the predominant group which had initiated and supported the development of standards for improving teacher education and certification was forced to oppose their adoption. Then, as various groups which had been consulted for input early in the development of the standards began to examine the final draft many concerns were raised and transmitted to the State Superintendent of Education. A review of those letters reveals four major problems:

1. The use of a single score from a standardized college entrance examination to screen students who might choose teaching as a career.
2. The specification of the number of faculty and the staffing required of teacher education institutions.
3. The establishment of minimum enrollment criteria for all teacher education programs.
4. The changing of levels of certification from three to four with the apparent intent to create exclusive middle school certification.

Much of the initial opposition to the new standards came in reaction to the effect they would have on the programs in institutions of higher education. It was apparent that the quantitative criteria would virtually eliminate all smaller teacher education programs without regard to

the quality of those programs or the effectiveness of their graduates. Between the time the new standards were placed before the State Board of Education and subsequent adoption no fewer than ten professional associations had joined the Alabama AACTE in opposing them. At an open hearing in late November there were over thirty representatives of organizations and associations pledged to oppose parts of the document in its present form, outweighing the proponents four to one.

Aside from the effects the new standards may have on institutions, a somewhat minor issue, there are two major problems which must be reconciled before they can be implemented to improve teacher education in Alabama.

First, the drastic change from a qualititative approach to teacher competency to quantitative criteria for institutional programs must be reversed. These criteria have not been tested, nor is there any evidence that any of them will produce better teachers. The effect of these criteria enables the State Board of Education to dictate to public and private institutions the number of faculty to be employed by each discipline, the qualifications of those faculty and specific courses which must be placed in the curriculum. For example, an institution can no longer stipulate that a student develop certain competencies in developing and evaluating tests. Under the new standards each student must take a course in measurement and show it on his academic record. This requirement is entirely quantitative

and leaves no room for the institution to explore several alternatives to meeting the basic competencies required for making out tests. Many have viewed this intrusion into the respective institutions' prerogatives for faculty and curriculum quality control as a vote of no confidence for all institutions of higher education in Alabama regardless of past performance in teacher education. It may also be viewed as a direct or obvious attempt to increase funding for faculty within larger State universities in which funding priorities place education at the lower end of the scale. Large multi-purpose institutions with graduate and undergraduate programs in teacher education have little difficulty meeting the quantitative criteria for faculty staffing. On the other hand a small institution which has traditionally produced small numbers of excellent teachers may be disenfranchised under the new standards. It seems ironic that the State Board of Education would adopt a standard (minimum score of 16 on the ACT) which will reduce the number of students who qualify for enrollment in teacher education programs by 42% and in the same document require an increase in the number of teacher education faculty within each institution (three FTE faculty with doctoral training per program). In these days of austere budgeting in both public and private institutions this dream of prosperity in teacher education is unrealistic.

The second major problem with the new standards relates to problems in Alabama which have little relationship to the

quality of teacher education. In separate articles written by the co-authors of the new standards, [3] it is proposed that the standards should resolve many problems which are only indirectly relevant to teacher education and certification.

Those problems are:

1. the proliferation of graduate programs in teacher education throughout the State
2. the development of standards for middle school faculty
3. the surplus of teachers
4. diminishing enrollment in higher education
5. the large number of certification programs in small institutions

No one would deny that these problems should be addressed by educators, but many would question that certification and program standards should be the primary instrument for forcing changes to solve these or other similar problems in education. Does the State Board intend to eliminate the program which produces four or five excellent elementary teachers a year by requiring the equivalent of three professors with doctorates to teach that number? Or, should the standards be re-written to allow the possibility that one outstanding professor in elementary education can garner the resources and provide the necessary experiences in the field to produce a few sensitive and capable elementary teachers? There are small institutions with limited faculty that have consistently produced teachers of high quality.

Serious questions can be raised about the extent to which the new standards have addressed the problems of lesser magnitude while leaving unresolved the more important issues — issues presented to the original committee to re-write the certification requirements:

1. minimum competencies expected of first-year teachers
2. recognition of NCATE accreditation as a proxy for State approval
3. identification of the characteristics of those teacher education programs which are producing effective teachers

During the six-year period following the adoption of the resolution on teacher education in 1972 there have been two extensive studies directed toward improving teacher education in Alabama — the teacher education program evaluation conducted by the State Department of Education and the first-year teacher pilot program conducted by the University of Alabama in Birmingham and Auburn University under the auspices of the State Department of Education. The evaluation study examined how well Alabama colleges and universities prepared teachers in four areas of competency: Planning, Instructional Strategies, Managerial Competencies and Professional Competencies. The first-year teacher project designed and validated procedures and strategies for improving

teacher competencies. Both studies generated the kinds of relationships and dialogue among the various educational constituenties in Alabama interested in improving teacher effectiveness which seem necessary for developing standards and guidelines for preparing and certifying teachers. There is also a wealth of data about quality control of teacher education which seem to indicate that the type of programmatic standards proposed in the new bulletin have little to do with teaching effectiveness.[4] On the contrary, studies by Jere Brophy[5] and Carolyn Everton[6] and the results of Homer Coker's[7] project to validate teacher competencies in Georgia indicate success in teaching is closely related to the characteristics of persons who teach in the specific situations in which they work.

It is apparent that the findings of the two major studies of teacher education conducted in Alabama and current national research findings do not serve as a data base for the new teacher education and certification standards in Alabama. Furthermore, some of the specific criteria are contradictory to known research in teacher preparation.

It cannot be denied that some standards to insure quality in preparation and certification of teachers are important, and that in the final analysis, it is the legal responsibility of the State Board of Education to set those standards through certification. It is also important that those institutions that prepare teachers for certification

work closely with the State Board of Education and other constituent groups and associations to develop standards which relate directly to the quality of instruction expected of teachers in the classroom. Too many of the criteria in the new standards do not relate to quality of instruction and those should be eliminated.

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F O O T N O T E S

[1]"Statement of the Nature, Purpose and Objectives of the Alabama Association of Colleges For Teacher Education," adopted Nov. 8, 1971.

[2]Resolution of the Alabama State Board of Education, January, 1972.

[3]Pierce, Truman M., "Teacher Education: Past, Present and Future," The Professional Educator, vol. I, No. 1, Spring, 1978 and
Roberts, M. L., "Developing New Standards for Teacher Education and Certification, "The Professional Educator, vol. II, No. 1, Spring, 1978.

[4]Quality Control in Teacher Education: Some Policy Issues, AACTE, May, 1977, Washington, D.C.

[5]Brophy, Jere, et al. "Criteria Referenced Observational Measurement in the Classroom," Report No. 4041, University of Texas Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, 1976.

[6]Everston, Carolyn, Process-Outcome Relationships Final Report, University of Texas Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, 1978.

[7]Coker, Homer, Presentation at the AACTE Annual Conference, Chicago, Ill., February, 1979.